

Art Museum: U of T unveils Toronto's newest, coolest gallery and collection

More than 8,000 holdings from four collections comprise city's largest museum-standard visual-art museum and collection, after the Art Gallery of Ontario

Arthur Kaptainis

Doors opened at 7 p.m. By 8 there was a lineup.

"We are truly inspired by the response," said **Barbara Fischer**, executive director and chief curator of what is now known as the Art Museum at the University of Toronto.

"We very much want people at U of T and the public at large to know where we are and what we do. And we are confident that we will become an ever-more-vital hub for the arts and culture community."



Hamster wheel? This installation by the VSVSVS collective is intended to comment on the fitness fixation of condo dwellers (all photos courtesy the Art Museum)

The January 21 event marked the opening of Showroom, an exhibition of recent artworks that comment on the social repercussions of rapid urban development. It also marked the rebranding of the University of Toronto Art Centre (in University College) and the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery (in nearby Hart House) as [the Art Museum](#).

With more than 8,000 holdings from four collections, these federated galleries represent the largest museum-standard visual-art museum and collection in Toronto after the Art Gallery of Ontario.

"The Art Museum serves as a vital centre for research and education and is a vibrant cultural resource," U of T Vice-President and Provost **Cheryl Regehr** told a wall-to-wall crowd estimated by gallery representatives at between 600 and 750.

"In this new form, the Art Museum continues to be emblematic of President **Meric Gertler's** priorities to engage in city-building, to increase the internationalization of U of T and to reimagine undergraduate education."

Professor **Donald Ainslie**, principal of University College, noted that the UTAC, one of the Art Museum's predecessor institutions, came about thanks to the vision of alumni from UC and from the Toronto chapter of the Delta Gamma women's fraternity.

"The idea was to have a venue to preserve and display U of T's and University College's art collections and to ensure that the university's broad expertise in so many areas could be shared with the general public through the medium of visual art," Ainslie said.



Showroom – the title riffs on the ubiquitous model suites that offer a generic ideal of living – includes works in a wide range of media and styles. Visitors are first confronted with a please-touch array of exercise machines made of wood and concrete blocks. This installation by the VSVSVS collective is intended to comment on the fitness fixation of condo dwellers.

In adjacent rooms are videos, sculptures, photographs, digital images, paintings applied directly to the gallery walls and even some traditional oils. Chalk to Cheese by Roula Partheniou, a table of carefully arrayed household and recreational objects (including a bowling pin, a doorstop, a Rubik's cube and a Slinky), perhaps evokes the myriad ways city-dwellers make less-than-optimal use of time. Jimmy Limit's Fruit and Ceramic Arrangement 4 pays playful homage to the traditional still life.

Most biting of the parodies is Model for Water Route Waterfront Development Project, a tabletop model of a hypothetical (and flagrantly ordinary) cluster of buildings at the water's edge in Toronto. Panels on the side of this sculpture by the collective called Life of a Craphead invoke spurious comparisons with the dazzling Sydney Opera House and majestic Mount Fuji.



While most of the Art Museum's interior space is dedicated to temporary exhibitions, it remains anchored by

selections from the acclaimed permanent collection, including ancient steles, medieval icons and Adam and Eve, a priceless painting of 1538 by Lucas Cranach the Elder.

"We are immensely proud of this great collection and want to share it with Toronto," said Fischer, who is also an associate professor, teaching stream, of curatorial studies.

While the Thursday turnout created a dramatic start for the Art Museum, there will be further developments.

"We look forward to intensified programming and exhibitions, as well as a major renovation of our front entrance and collections spaces," Fischer said. "We want to increase engagement with students across the university, and to support a new generation of artists, writers, curators and culture-sector professionals."



The Art Museum at U of T will offer supporting programs, including afternoons of performance art on Feb. 6 and March 5, a curatorial tour on Feb. 11 and a panel discussion with Fischer, Luis Jacob and Showroom curator Sarah Robayo Sheridan on Feb. 24.

Art Museum hours are noon to 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday and noon to 8 p.m. on Wednesday. Go to <http://artmuseum.utoronto.ca>

Posted Monday, January 25, 2016

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